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## **Institutional Mechanisms and Conditions for the Transition to Independence and Responsibility. Adolescence as a Transition**

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*This paper presents the rationale for the transformation of educational institutions, young people, as the transition from child to adult types of development. The reasons for change are the three concepts of marginal activities in the cultural-historical approach: the game, learning and work (labor), as well as the description of three types of age of people development: childhood, transition (awkward age), adult age. The idea of transforming the institution of education in its youth as a transitional type of development is based on the premise that such an institution must recreate with each coming generation horizons, images and patterns of performance and connectivity of the objectives, conditions and resources of learning, which acts as "a test body" of life-planning, an adult training site in adolescence.*

*Keywords: developmental psychology, development, adolescence, high school, transitions*

### **Introduction**

In this article we shall try to construct a justification of ideas about the horizons and the program of work in those areas in which educational institutions can develop young people, given that these institutions are a transition from the child to adult types of development. Naturally, these institutions include the age cohort of about 16 to 20 years in contemporary Russia.

In the cultural-historical approach, the processes of education are considered, on the one hand, as intended to resolve the contradictions of child development, and on the other – both have inherent contradictory nature. In the definition of education as a process of "forming – educating"

of a man we adhere to this approach supported by L. S. Vygotsky (1997) and his followers. Key psychological representations are our motives and grounds of changes in educational institutions of youth, defining, inter alia, economic and legal requirements for the conditions and mechanisms of maturation.

The system of education and social expectations, along with the fact of biological maturity set for high school students the task of choosing their life prospects. It is believed that at this age stage, boys and girls have the resources for this choice<sup>1</sup>. Studies of many psychologists suggest that this is not true. At the same time, we understand that the educational institution

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may either contribute to or hinder the solution of problems of youth age. Studies of L. I. Bozhovic (1995), V. Davydov (2000), D. B. Elkonin (1989) and others have shown that the ratio of external requirements with the capabilities and needs of the child is the core of the social situation that determines its further development. What is the idea that you can use to describe the development in adolescence, and what are the requirements for the institutional conditions and mechanisms of transition to adulthood (independence and responsibility)?

**On the one hand,** we rely on the representations of three marginal activities that are highlighted in the Hegelian tradition, and developed in the national psychology of development in cultural-historical approach: the game, learning and work (labor). It is important to note that an understanding of labor is not associated only with the type of industrial production. Psychologically, labor for us is every man's productivity and performance, which demonstrates to others independence and responsibility in carrying out activities. In this sense, post-industrial, information age also has its own requirements for human autonomy, responsibility and performance, which, incidentally, according to some psychologists, blur the traditional (industrial) age limits, confirming a well-known idea that age is something that is set (assigned), but not given.

**On the other hand,** normal activity is possible only if it exists as an institution. In other words, the game, learning and work (labor) should be "equipped with facilities" in the educational institutions so as to form a precise age assignment, requirements for development, providing age-amplification.

Take a look at the history of developmental education in the country. Creation of the ideological and technological solutions of the relationship between learning and development

for the elementary school took about 30 years and led to an understandable and even ideological shifting technology. In large part, we advanced the understanding of how to build a learning process in line with developing training according to Elkonin-Davydov. However, what has changed in schools in both institutions? What are the conditions and mechanisms of change so that they themselves have replaced old ones? What is our idea of a school, where the practice of developing education? How does it differ from traditional schools?

Let's look at the fate of two other interesting initiatives in the school – teaching and project (or, more precisely, designing) activities of young people and educational and research activities of high school students, which can be attributed to modern ideas of schooling. What is happening? With the explicit heuristic ideas for children's development, and even when they are good technological elaboration, they live up to that time, while not threatening the school, above all, change relationships with the student, changing institution of school and its long conditions and mechanisms. How do you supervise children's project or research, if you need to teach lessons? How can we organize such work, if not the necessary equipment, relationships, competence of personnel, and mode of operation?

All these examples demonstrate the basic question of changes – changes in the conditions and mechanisms of the school, changing schools as an institution as a whole. At the same time, we often work only in the design logic, forgetting about the last station – to change the school in its institutional characteristics.

### Three Types of Development

We distinguish three types of age of human development. These three types of development can be characterized by the relationship between the game, learning and work (labor).

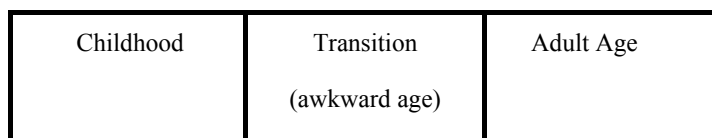


Fig. 1. Three Types of Development

Children's type of development is associated primarily with the game and learning how to reproduce the activity (Davydov, 2000), which are "loaded" in childhood. And if there is a game based on the impossibility of the realization of meanings and relations of the adult world (role playing game), then there is the doctrine based on the apparent impossibility of the realization, "naturalized" tools of adult (non-children's) world (reading, writing and counting). Thus, adulthood is childhood, first as a horizon of meaning relations between adults (role playing game), and then – as the horizon "Skillful mind" (reading, writing and counting). It is essential that an educational institution in its structure, the mechanisms and conditions serves for the game and learning. The relationship of children and adults are mediated primarily by institutional conditions such as a thematic program, the group (class), a means of assessing the results of games or exercises, and evaluation of games and exercises embedded in the context of group and discipline (teaching subject), organization of work of adults and children's learning lives.

Adult type of development, in our opinion, is not characterized by reproducing activity (game or learning), but by a new relationship that arises between the game and learning, the emergence of labor in human life. And such initial appearance is not immediate, but occurs in the horizon of personal perspective. This means that the game and learning have been "set" at work (labor). In other words, the game and learning become the means of teaching for the purpose of "better" performance of the individual.

Actually the transition type of development is characterized by the fact that labor is not a goal but the game and learning have already exhausted the energy of development. Work in a transitional type of development serves as an immediate horizon, as well as a frame for exercise and play. In other words, during the period of youth, the question arises, for what must be learned, based on what perspective? A figurative expression L. S. Vygotsky (1930): "A teenager is looking at the future from the perspective of the present, whereas a young man is looking at the present from the perspective of the future." That's when the subjective reality has such a "view from the perspective of the future", the transition is being formed. Therefore, at this point, we can raise the question about the institute, confining such a transitional type of development, the material of which the first is way of life, and basic tool – life planning as a new functional system, the connectivity goals, conditions and resources in life expectancy. In this case the phrase "life plan" here does not sound in the sense of direct means of production, but in the sense of the becoming, breeding up adolescents. Youth in our understanding, is the transition from the childishness to maturity, and development in adolescence is not because the children's ages, i.e. not according to the logic of change of the sustainable age for a crisis. We assume that in adolescence the establishment of the planning activity takes place through finding solutions to conflicts relating to the harmonization / mismatch in areas of life plan.

After a series of works we already have enough evidence to suggest that in adolescence, maturing occurs due to the development of life skills to a holistic planning and design of the life in a plan. The content of the plan is to coordinate resources and personal aspirations, and psychological form – experience the life of the plan and samples of its implementation. From this perspective, the life plan is a means of aligning the resources, conditions and aspirations. It (life plan) is determined by the complex dynamics and structure of action: selection of the ideal goal of a sufficiently large time field of given alternatives; account of available resources; account of the possibility of acquiring the necessary resources, the balance of the real goals in a hierarchy of achievement, inclusion in the hierarchy of the realism aspect of achievement; tasking the acquisition of the necessary, but still missing resources to achieve a real assessment of each goal for the approximation to the ideal goal, adjust claims and the hierarchy of realistic goals in line with developments, research and recording conditions. However, in general, a life plan of boys (girls) is a method of communication (coordination) of claims, conditions and resources.

According to V. Davydov (1986), the leading types of activities for adolescents are educational and professional. After 11th grade in high school students have an exam, completing their formal childhood. So they are put in a situation of choosing their own perspectives of education, which in this situation is associated with the profession. It leads to the understanding of the idea of professional self-determination as the idea of leading activity for young people, and ideas about careers are some foundations of meaningful vision of the future for a boy or a girl.

Judgments of school senior pupils <sup>2</sup> quite often contain only a general idea of the order-ideals of a future life and prospects of the profession,

and the tested did not use them in the fantasy images, typical of a teenage way of perspective structuring. At the same time in their judgment there are no estimates of external and internal resources, conditions and instructions on actions to achieve goals. It seems that the accumulated resources are beginning to act the subject of evaluation, but in this case, is not associated with the perspective or view of the purpose and the system of previous achievements.

The situation of choice is often based on what a person likes. Sometimes there are arguments to justify personal goals, and ideas about the constraints of the situation cannot be described. High school students point to the lack of resources to achieve the goal, but at the same time, the description of the proposed action plans and the ratio of the specific objectives and necessary resources available. Often answers to the question, what do you think needs to be done, are: “I will try,” “first try, and then understand.” High school students, as opposed to boys and girls older (students or employees), are characterized by volatility, “throwing from side to side,” the substitution of a task by another task of the same level of complexity, as well as they are characterized by the hope that with the understanding that the goal the half of the matter is done, and that now the plan is certainly going to work.

Thus, planning for young people arises as a possible leading activity in reference to the phenomenon of productivity (or labor) horizon, with the simultaneous failure of its implementation. Productivity just requires more than just setting goals, but also clearly defines specific conditions and resources to achieve them with respect to this goal and to each other. In other words, the performance is impossible without a new functional organization (or a functional body) rights – life planning. In our opinion, this is what forms the basis of an age-being in adolescence.

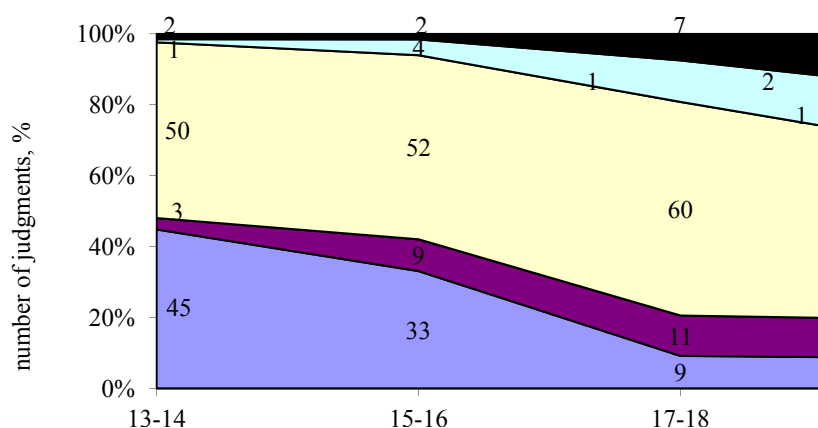


Fig. 2. Dynamics of changes in the elements of life planning in the statements of young men and women in the planning process (method of “Coordination”, the tested, 80 people, 13 to 21 years)

These findings are confirmed in a dissertation study we conducted<sup>3</sup>. Part of the research was conducted according to the author’s method of “Coordination.” In which the tested were asked to construct a route march on the topographic map, to rank the necessary resources for the campaign, and then by analogy with a topographical map to draw a map of his/her life. The study resulted in the allocation of four elements of building life plan: goals – ambitions; resources; conditions; the plan as ways for coordination (communication) of objectives, conditions and resources.

The figure represents the number of judgments for each element of life plan, in the age dynamics.

### **The structure of educational interests of high school age**

We studied the structure of the educational interests of high school pupils using the technique “Virtual School”<sup>4</sup>. First, we asked the children what subjects they study in school and what they do in their spare time. All the information was written on the board, and the expert to each type of training assigned a “cost” in terms of money and time: subjects in the “Virtual School”, “were taught” at three levels (standard, elementary

and advanced), every kind of entertainment and activities in clubs, on the courses and sections were also associated by a certain amount of «money» and «time». Then the participants were asked to distract from the constraints of real life and to choose only what they really need. The choice was limited to a certain amount of resources allocated to each child (conditional “money” and “time”), they had to distribute to class. The student could use a sum of conditional money, enough to cover all the subjects of the standard level and the amount of time equal to a week, minus time for sleep and meal. The time period of the game is conditionally equal to one year and is organized by the school quarters, where every quarter new rules are being introduced. The first quarter of is a trial and introductory period, in the second quarter the amount of time is being reduced, in the third – “money”, and in the fourth quarter school attendance is optional.

We analyzed the results based on three main areas in which students put their resources: the area of compulsory education, the area of proactive education, and the free time (entertainment) area. When allocating resources, high school students put 48 % of conventional “time” and “money” (conditional “time” and

“money”) to the area of compulsory education. 43 % of this 48 % is spent by high school students to the subjects required for admission to college. 2 % of all the resources was spent to the subjects that seem to be appealing to high school students due to the teacher’s personality. Finally, 3 % of the resources was occupied by the subjects that are of interest to high school students in terms of their applicability in life.

In our view, the emergence of a responsible, sustainable interest in the area of training for the admission to a higher educational institution for the most part is defined by the present situation of the vocational choice. *“The Institute (college) is a step towards future work, therefore even if from the school pupils were transferred to the Institute, they still need to learn the subjects close to their future profession, so that they would be useful later in their work.”* Therefore, if the choice of an institution is justified, then the subjects are seen as useful for life and they are not refused from under any circumstances. On the other hand we can trace a substantive affection, or “affection of the object language”, i.e. the prospect of life for some reason is discussed in the language of the subject. *“The main stimulus for the choice of subjects is an aptitude for the subject or attendance at a university (i.e. interest is in the relationship and responsibility for their choices)”*. Of course, school subjects have social value, selecting them, high school students follow the stereotype of the importance of these subjects to life for the exam and for communication. The question – what do you study for – high school students who do not have informed choice of their future profession, say: *“in order to be smart and educated”* or *“school needs to raise the image of the state, but one can live without the school”*. Basically, these students when they are set free from their responsibilities, i.e. when they are given permission not to attend school in a game

situation, completely abandon their studies in favor of entertainment.

It is the *justification* of their choice of future, which has a great importance for the interest of high school students to learning a subject or an educational field. For us, a reasonable high school student life plan is a description of not only the chosen career path, but also the reason why this way is possible. That is, a boy or a girl really estimates opportunities, prescribes actions to achieve not only final but also intermediate goals. The justification of the life plan was assessed by experts and was based on video materials, interviews were conducted after the game procedures.

The data indicated in Figure 3 shows that girls with justified life plans more than 50 % of the resources invested in the area of compulsory education, more than 30 % in the area of proactive educational interest, i.e. to an education which is not defined by someone, and is made on their own. Boys in this respect are slightly different. They spend more resources on compulsory education (70 %) and slightly less on proactive – 21 %. Thus, on average, boys and girls who have chosen the university and their social position, steadily invest in education from 84 to 91 percent of resources. Consequently, for the area of entertainment they have not more than 16 % of the resources. Thus, high school students who have a clear idea of their future life, and a justified choice of profession, have strong interests in learning, i.e. have the justification of claims, and can potentially make a plan.

Boys and girls who have an unjustified life plan “spend” 30 % of the resources on the part of compulsory education, and proactive education area occupies 26 % of girls’ resources, investments of boys in general are equal to zero. At the same time on entertainment, they leave an average 60 % of the resources. It is our

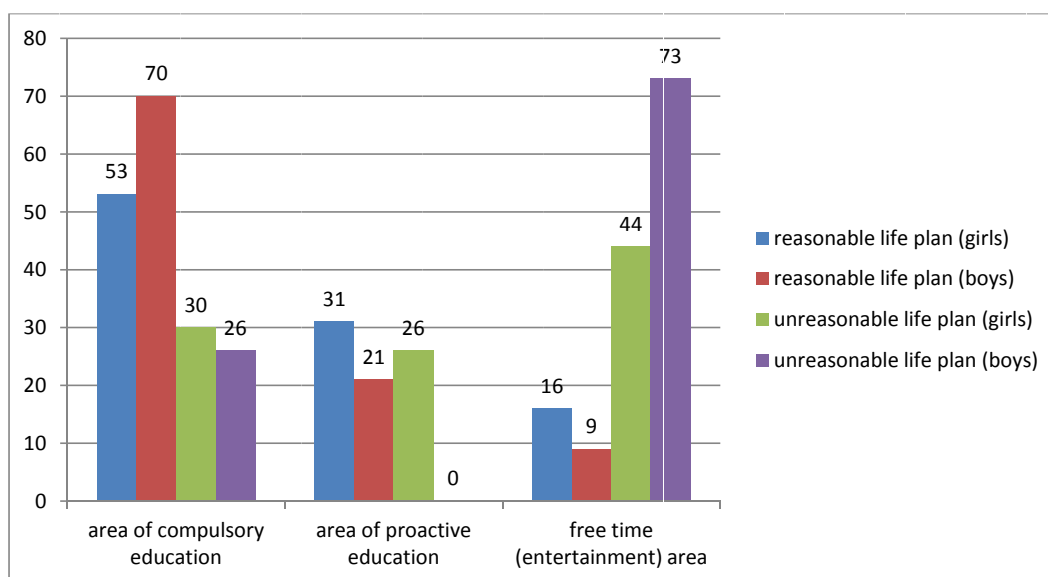


Fig. 3. “The Dependence of the Educational Interests of High School Pupils on Justification of the Life Plan”

view this suggests that in reality they do not have interests for learning, even though they may call a name of the university they want to enroll. According to school administrators 95 % of high school pupils know exactly and can say to what college (university), and what specialty they will be heading to after school. But according to our survey, only 40 % who participated in the study have justified life plans and invest in a game situation a lot of resources in the study, especially in proactive education. These high school students point out to special events taking place in their schools. For example, in one of the schools involved in the study, regular discussion of life plans with the ability to choose their individual programs within the high school. At the same time on proactive education high school students of this school in the game were spent 31.8 % of resources, on average, more than the other two schools, also which participated in the study (25.8 %, 10.9 %).

It can be assumed that the events that make the students not only think about where they want

to enroll, as is done in a traditional school, but also think about what they have to achieve this, and why they want to enroll into this very specialty (major) – all that “awakens” the interests in their studies in high school.

The figure apart from that shows the differences between boys and girls. So, a girl with a justified life plans invest nearly 20 % less resources in the area of compulsory education than men, while in the area of entertainment it is almost 2 times more. Girls with unjustified life plans invest in the area of leisure time 30 % less resources than boys, in the compulsory education between the two is almost no difference, and in the area of proactive education such boys, unlike girls do not invest at all. These gender differences in the interest of learning can presumably be explained by the fact that in high school are mostly young men left, who are successful and adapted to the school built in female gender characteristics<sup>5</sup>.

The study shows that the real educational interest in the senior school age pupils appears only together with a justified life plan and a career

choice. Great importance for the understanding of the justification of their life plans in high school students and, consequently, for their interest in study, has the organization of school activities to discuss the reasons for their choice of social position and life plan.

### **The contours of the future.**

#### **What should I do?**

If we trust the original data and assumptions outlined in the beginning, then we must ask ourselves what are the institutional arrangements and mechanisms for the formation of “life planning”<sup>6</sup>, and what should we change in high school and college? Rather, the transformation of educational institutions in adolescence should be directed to the phenomenon of horizons, images and samples of performance, the material which will build a relationship to the educational process (learning). This should change the high school and college, which still are not development institutions.

It is important to point out the fact that this discrepancy is tied to relations with young adulthood, which organize the work of an educational institution. It is very important because it is adults who ‘hold’ institute as an institution, and bear all the key terms and arrangements for its functioning. In this sense, the changes are needed in the following terms and conditions and mechanisms (a preliminary list):

rights and responsibilities of young people to change (transformation) of their own curriculum – in the direction of increasing the “options” self-selection with trial forms of accountability for the results of the selection and removal of part of the responsibility for the results of passing the school curriculum. For boys and girls should be able to change their curriculum. For example, speech of Maria, 16 years of age: “I was a curriculum based on what is going to connect their lives

with economic activity. Accordingly, the selected in-depth level math, social studies at the profile level, the physics (and suddenly the Polytechnic on the economy going.) But then I realized that the interest in health and medicine, which I think is just a hobby, I have a lot and I want to do this in my life. I’m going to medical school. And that means that I need to study biology and chemistry at the depth level, and in-depth mathematics is not needed. That is, you need to go in the other groups in mathematics, biology and chemistry”;

clearance procedures for the choice of individual programs, motivation for learning on them. The levels of readiness (independence, responsibility, academic success in the development of programs on the subjects) to the training of graduates of DCI juvenile stages are different. Based on experience we can say that two-thirds of tenth-graders are capable of designing and implementing individual educational programs. For the remaining part the task of teaching organized on an individual educational plan is a formal, distorted understood as unnecessary stress. The difference due to both the individual characteristics of adolescents, since the terms of preparing for the transition to DCI (Grade 9);

design of “corridors” of the educational value of courses (credits) for young people to self-determine the weight of a course. An example of such a corridor could be an individual education program. Olga, 17 years old: “I’m just confident in my future profession – a journalist. So I chose to profile level Russian language, literature, English and psychology at the basic level of mathematics, science and laboratory profile of linguistics. At the same time I’ll try myself as a journalist in the school newspaper – will be writing articles on the exciting topics for all high school students;

rights and responsibilities of youth in the formation of study groups (groups) for the passage of certain courses. For example, Misha, 16 years of



age is saying about his responsibilities: «Catching up in-depth group in mathematics, I have to learn at “good” and “excellent”. The lower mark, means a transfer to a lower level study of the subject. It is possible, and move in the opposite direction – if I had studied at the profile level getting highest marks, so I would have proved that I am able to study in the advanced group, then I would have been entitled to transfer to it”;

registration requirements of economic conditions of the educational programs of courses – in the direction of calculating the cost of such programs, the detection and exclusion of “exotic” options that require unrealistic resources (equipment, salaries, supplies, training materials, time);

“Contract” scheme of teaching courses, where the group discussed the agreement on the expected outcomes of the course, resources and environment. For example, the possibility of shared responsibility between teacher and pupils. A teacher at the beginning of the course presents students results and discusses with them the conditions under which this result will be achieved – what is required of teachers, and what is required from the student. If the conditions are satisfied only with one hand – have nothing to rely on the claimed result;

calculating the “corridor” of time spent on the passage of a course and presentation of the “corridor” as a critical learning environment;

standards for calculating per capita funding of individual learning plans and the presentation

of the resource limits of security. For example, the content of regulations along with the number of hours (“net hours” of the curriculum), the resources needed to support individual teacher education programs (tutoring, scientific management of educational research, social planning, program participation in intellectual contests, new staff positions and changes in functional etc.). For schools the proposed practice of calculating is new, as in the tradition of comprehensive school calculations are always done on the basis of declarative cheap quality education, strict limits mandatory 25 students in the group, etc.;

Design and calculation security conditions and resources of educational design and teaching and research activities. For a comprehensive school design and educational and research activities are an innovation for which the resource is a new component of teachers’ qualifications.

Thus, the institution of a transitional type of development must recreate with each coming generation horizons, images and patterns of performance and connectivity of the objectives, conditions and resources of learning, acting as “a test body” of life-planning, training ground of adulthood in adolescence. High school and university in this sense should be a trial place of life planning so that youngsters could actually themselves vary their own resources and conditions in connection with those purposes which are made in one’s youth, should be able to give young people the possibility of implementing their own projects.

<sup>1</sup> We define the resource of choice as «the ability to analyze existing opportunities, match them with their abilities and available resources, to realize the value of the choices made for their own future and take responsibility for the rejection of other alternatives.»

<sup>2</sup> A more detailed description of this material is in the article by P. A. Sergomanov and N. P. Vasilyeva, “On the Question of Content and Experience of Conflict in Adolescence”, “Journal of Practical Psychologist” № 3, 2004, Moscow, p. 45-57.

<sup>3</sup> Васильева Н.П. Динамика разрешения конфликтов развития в юношеском возрасте: дисс. ... канд. психол. наук, 19.00.13 : защищена 13.04.06. – Красноярск, 2006. 201 с.

<sup>4</sup> The technique was designed to study the dynamics of educational interests in preparation for the conference «Pedagogics of Development», 2004, authors: N.P.Vasileva, M.M. Kuzhabekova, E.V. Nikitina, under the supervision of B. Hasan.

<sup>5</sup> The traditional school, according to some researchers (Б.И.Хасан, Г.М. Бреслав, 1996), is a women’s institute of mentality. Therefore, boys are often unsuccessful in school, there are few male teachers in schools, and fathers do not like to go to parent-teacher conferences at school and avoid direct involvement in their children’s education.

- <sup>6</sup> We are not talking about the linear, non-system view of the life planning. A simple requirement to plan anything can be applied only to an adult person who has an idea about the dependence of the objectives, conditions and resources of its own way. The question is not in the ability to plan, but in the feeling of connectedness, the integrity of the transition to labor.

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## **Институциональные механизмы и условия перехода к самостоятельности и ответственности.**

### **Юношеский возраст как переходный**

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*В статье представлено обоснование необходимости трансформации образовательных институтов юношества, как переходных от детского к взрослому типам развития. Основаниями для изменения являются представления о трех предельных видах деятельности в культурно-историческом подходе: игра, учение и труд, а также на описании трех типов возрастного развития человека: детский, переходный, взрослый.*

*Идея трансформации института образования в юношестве как переходного типа развития базируется на тезисе, что такой институт должен воссоздавать с каждым приходящим поколением горизонты, образы и образцы производительности, а также связность целей, условий и ресурсов осуществления обучения, выступающего «пробным телом» жизненного планирования, тренировочной площадкой взрослости в юношеском возрасте.*

*Ключевые слова: психология возраста, развитие, юношеский возраст, старшая школа, переходы.*

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